Race-Related Differences in Self-Reported and Validated Turnout

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Black Americans are less likely to participate in politics than white Americans are, but many studies argue that low levels of black participation result solely from racial differences in socioeconomic status. Analyses of the 1964, 1976, 1978, and 1980 SRC-CPS election surveys show that racial differences in reported turnout are greatly reduced or even reversed when controls for region and level of education are introduced. However, substantially different results obtain when turnout is measured by the SRC-CPS voter validation studies in which local registration and voting records are used to measure individual-level participation: the zero-order differences in turnout are larger, and controls for region and level of education only moderately reduce these differences. Analyses of the voter validation data suggest that blacks are less likely to vote than similarly situated whites.

Black Americans are less likely to participate in politics than white Americans are, but many students of political behavior now argue that low levels of black participation result solely from racial differences in socioeconomic status. This conclusion seems plausible since once controls for socioeconomic status are introduced black participation across a wide range of political acts often equals or exceeds white participation (Verba

and Nie, 1972, pp. 149–73; Milbrath and Goel, 1977, pp. 119–22; Cohen, Cotter, and Coulter, 1983).   Sociologists have reported similar results for measures of social as well as political participation (Orum, 1966; Olsen, 1970, 1982, pp. 57–66; Smith, 1980, pp. 517–18; Guterbock and London, 1983).

Studies of black turnout yield results similar to studies of other forms of participation, but with one major exception.   Controls for socioeconomic status reduce differences between blacks and whites, but they do not eliminate them.   However, controls for several other demographic variables, particularly region in conjunction with socioeconomic status, do eliminate or even reverse racial differences (Verba and Nie, 1972, p. 170; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, pp. 90–91).   Indeed, the prevailing wisdom among political scientists today is that race does not have an independent depressing effect on political participation, including turnout in national elections.

The relatively high levels of black participation which emerge once controls for socioeconomic status are introduced are often explained by the effects of group consciousness (Olsen, 1970; Verba and Nie, 1972, pp. 157–60; Milbrath and Goel, 1977, p. 121; Shingles, 1981; Cohen, Cotter, and Coulter, 1983).   Most of these arguments suggest that these feelings contribute to relatively high black turnout, although Shingles (1981) argues that the very attitudes that contribute to other forms of black political participation may impede black turnout.   On the other hand, Miller et al. (1981) argue that feelings of group consciousness, combined with other attitudes, do contribute to black electoral participation, but they do not claim that these feelings lead blacks to have relatively higher turnout than whites.

Survey data on social and political participation are based upon asking respondents whether or not they engaged in specified participatory acts. There are few external standards against which such reports can be compared and evaluated.   Voting differs from most forms of participation because we can compare levels of reported turnout against official voting records.   Postelection surveys in the United States always substantially overestimate turnout, partly because some respondents who do not vote claim to have voted.   In 1964, 1976, 1978, and 1980 the University of Michigan Survey Research Center conducted "voter validation" studies that checked local registration and voting records to determine whether respondents were registered and whether or not they voted.   Analyses of these voter validation studies show that blacks are more likely to over-report voting than whites.   (See Traugott and Katosh, 1979; Katosh and Traugott, 1981; Sigelman, 1982; and Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, 1983, p. 92.)   As Wolfinger and Rosenstone note (1980, p. 118), the finding that blacks are more likely to overreport voting calls into question the

thesis that controls for other variables eliminate or reverse racial dif-
ferences in turnout.

As we will show, controls for socioeconomic status and region do not
eliminate racial differences in turnout when the validated vote variable
replaces reported vote as the measure of electoral participation. When
the voter validation data are used, blacks remain less likely to vote than
similarly situated whites.

Assessing Racial Differences with Voter Validation Data

Our analysis is based on all four SRC-CPS voter validation studies. Like
all previous analyses, we found that blacks appeared to be more likely to
overreport voting than whites.[1]   In 1964, 9 percent of the whites who said
they voted (N = 845) were classified as nonvoters in the voter validation
study, while 21 percent of the blacks who said they voted (N = 76) were
classified as nonvoters. In 1976, comparable results were 16 percent for
whites (weighted N = 1493) and 32 percent for blacks (weighted
N = 138). In the 1978 midterm election, 21 percent of the whites who
said they voted (N = 1103) were classified as validated nonvoters, while
46 percent of the blacks who said they voted (N = 93) were so classified.
In 1980, comparable results were 14 percent for whites (N = 824) and 21
percent for blacks (N = 98).[2]

We do not know why blacks appear to be more likely to claim falsely to
have voted. This may result from a greater desire to give the socially ac-
ceptable response. For example, Schuman and Presser (1981, pp. 151,
154) show that blacks were more likely to state opinions on obscure con-
gressional bills than whites were, and Bishop et al. (1980) found that
blacks were more likely to express an opinion on a nonexistent policy pro-
posal. Both studies report that racial differences persist even when con-
trols are introduced for level of education. In addition, blacks may be
reluctant to admit they did not vote. Blacks have struggled to gain the
franchise, and it may be difficult for many to acknowledge that they
failed to exercise it. This possibility would be consistent with our finding
that in three out of four surveys southern blacks were more likely to over-
report voting than were blacks outside the South.

On the other hand, we cannot dismiss the possibility that some
systematic biases in the voter validation process have led to an
underestimation of the relative level of black turnout. The SRC field

[1] See our Appendix for the procedures used to classify respondents as validated voters or
nonvoters.

[2] These differences are not simply the result of ceiling effects that constrain overreporting
among whites. If we ask what percentage of validated nonvoters acknowledge that they did
not vote, whites are consistently more likely than blacks to say they did not go to the polls.

staff checks the voting report by searching for the respondent's name on a voter registration list and checking that list to determine whether the respondent voted.   Very few persons found to have voted by such a check are likely to be nonvoters.   Indeed, over the course of the four validation studies, between 97 percent and 99 percent of the whites who were classified as validated voters said they had voted, while among blacks between 94 and 98 percent of the validated voters said they had gone to the polls.   The prospects for error are greater, however, when respondents are classified as nonvoters.   Some are classified as nonvoters because local records show they did not vote.   Even here there is some chance of error, both by local election officials and by the SRC field staff.   The more frequent reason for a classification as a nonvoter is that no record of respondent registration was found.   Here the chances for clerical error can be substantial.   Maintaining registration lists is a local responsibility, and voter records may be maintained more accurately in more affluent white areas than in the poorer areas where blacks tend to reside.   Records may be maintained better in the North than in the South, where a disproportionate number of blacks live.[3]

There is in our view no definitive way to evaluate the extent to which black overreporting results from systematic biases that lead genuine black voters to be classified as validated nonvoters.   Such tests might be possible if the voter validation studies provided detailed information about the problems encountered in checking local registration and voting records.   Although the 1984 SRC-CPS election survey may include such information in a voter validation project, the four available validation studies do not.[4]   We must emphasize that we cannot rule out the possibility that the relationship between race and overreporting may be artifactual.

While the voter validation studies classify some genuine voters as nonvoters, we doubt that there is enough systematic error to account for racial differences in voting overreports.   We hold this view for two reasons.   First, while the arguments we have raised about possible race-related biases in the voter validation project are based on conjecture, we do have some empirical evidence that blacks are more likely than whites to give socially acceptable responses to interviewers.   Second, our findings about the relationship of race to validated turnout parallel recent findings based upon aggregate analyses of turnout (see Gilliam, 1983),

[3] In all four studies southern whites were more likely to be classified as overreporters than were whites outside the South.

[4] It would also be helpful if future studies allowed researchers to examine the effect of the race of the interviewer upon voting overreports.   Unfortunately, the ICPSR data do not reveal the race of the interviewer.   The 1964 codebook, but none of the others, provides information about the race of the person who checked the respondent's voter registration and voting records, but this is not necessarily the same person who interviewed the respondent.

which suggest that blacks are less likely to vote than whites even when controls for socioeconomic variables are introduced. Thus, our conclusion is that blacks are more likely to overreport voting than whites are, although we must acknowledge that the extent of that overreporting may not be as great as the SRC voter validation studies suggest.

The tendency of blacks to overreport voting leads to one basic result: racial differences in electoral participation are greater when turnout is measured by the validated vote variable. In 1964, whites are 15 percentage points more likely than blacks to say they voted, but whites are 19 percentage points more likely to vote when the validated vote measure is used. In 1976, an 8 point difference in reported turnout increases to a 16 percentage point difference in validated turnout. Similarly, in the 1978 midterm election, a 12 point difference in reported turnout becomes a 22 point difference in validated turnout. And, finally, in 1980, a 6 point difference in reported turnout (which falls below statistical significance) rises to a statistically significant 10 point difference in validated turnout.

THE EFFECTS OF CONTROLS ON RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN TURNOUT

We used level of formal education as our measure of the respondent's socioeconomic status. Although any measure of socioeconomic status will show black Americans to be relatively disadvantaged, we rely upon this single measure for two basic reasons. First, level of education is the single strongest socioeconomic predictor of turnout in the United States; other components of socioeconomic status have limited impact, once level of education is controlled (see Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, pp. 13–36). Most important, we wanted to present our results in a way that would be easy to replicate and interpret. We divided the electorate into five basic educational levels: eight grades or less, some high school, high school graduate, some college, and college graduate.[5]

We also explored the possibility that low black turnout may result partly from regional differences. Despite substantial migration to the

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[5] Our measure of level of education is based upon the respondent's self-report and, unlike our measure of turnout, we have no way to attempt to validate that report. There are certainly some respondents who will misreport their level of education, most often by exaggerating their educational accomplishments. If the same respondents who claimed higher than actual levels of education also were more likely to falsify their report of voting, these biases would tend to inflate the relationship between level of education and *reported* turnout. Such a bias might, in turn, lead us to overestimate the impact of level of education as a control variable upon the relationship between race and *reported* turnout. We have reason to think that such a systematic bias, if it exists, is not very important. We have compared the relationship between level of education and reported turnout with the relationship between level of education and validated turnout among each race within each region for all four surveys. There are only negligible and inconsistent differences between these relationships.

North, blacks are still much more likely than whites to live in the South. According to the 1980 Census, 45 percent of the nation's blacks live in the eleven states of the old Confederacy, while only 25 percent of the nation's whites do (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982a, p. 32). The political distinctiveness of the South has diminished during the past two decades, but at least during the 1964 survey Southerners faced a distinctive political environment. For blacks, institutional constraints as well as low socioeconomic status clearly impeded participation. In their 1961 survey of the South, Matthews and Prothro (1966, pp. 95–98) found that blacks were less likely to score high on their political participation scale than whites were even when combined controls were introduced for income, sex, age, occupation, and level of education. Southern politics have changed dramatically since the early 1960s, but even now turnout among both whites and blacks is lower in the South than in other regions (see U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983, p. vi). Southerners do have lower levels of formal education than Americans outside the South but, as Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980, pp. 93–94) demonstrate, low southern turnout persists even when controls for level of education are introduced. We divide Americans into two basic regions: those living in the South and those living outside the South.[6]

Our basic goal is to determine whether racial differences in turnout result solely from the lower educational levels and the southern residence of blacks.[7] Table 1 presents the percentage of whites and of blacks who said they voted controlling for region and level of education, while table 2 shows the percentage who voted when turnout is measured by the voter validation variable. Both tables clearly reveal that level of education is related to turnout among both races and within both regions. These tables also compare blacks and whites who live in the South with blacks and whites at similar educational levels who live outside the South. Such

[6] We define the South here as the states of the old Confederacy with the exception of Tennessee since the SRC-CPS samples respondents in Tennessee to represent the Border states.

[7] Controls for level of education and region do not exhaust all possible social factors that might contribute to low black turnout. For example, Kleppner (1982, pp. 114–22), in his analysis of racial differences in turnout, also introduces controls for gender and age. Blacks are more likely to be female than whites are, but U.S. Bureau of the Census surveys show that in 1964, 1968, and 1972 black women were as likely to report voting as black men, and that they were more likely to report voting than black men in 1976 (see Baxter and Lansing, 1980, pp. 91–112, for a discussion). U.S. Bureau of the Census surveys also show that in both 1978 and 1980 black women were more likely to report voting than black men (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979, p. 12; 1982b, p. 14). Controls for gender, therefore, cannot account for low black turnout. Blacks are somewhat younger than whites, and among both blacks and whites young adults are less likely to vote than their elders. However, our analyses of both the SRC-CPS surveys and of published U.S. Bureau of the Census results show that controls for age have only a small impact on reducing racial differences in reported turnout.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE WHO SAID THEY VOTED, BY RACE, REGION, AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION: 1964, 1976, 1978, 1980

Year of Election	Race	SOUTH					OUTSIDE THE SOUTH					
		8 Grades or Less	Some High School	High School Graduate	Some College	College Graduate	8 Grades or Less	Some High School	High School Graduate	Some College	College Graduate	Total
1964	White	62 (61)	62 (60)	66 (65)	79 (29)	81 (26)	74 (230)	79 (188)	85 (365)	90 (134)	90 (127)	79.9 (1285)
	Black	39 (38)	42 (24)	73 (11)	[1] (1)	[1] (1)	81 (21)	81 (18)	79 (14)	100 (11)	[8] (8)	65.3 (147)
1976	White	51 (70)	60 (79)	61 (130)	74 (94)	84 (58)	65 (223)	56 (215)	73 (643)	86 (310)	87 (294)	72.8 (2116)
	Black	52 (56)	59 (22)	57 (32)	80 (13)	[3] (3)	81 (16)	60 (24)	68 (20)	75 (31)	[8] (8)	64.6 (225)
1978	White	42 (62)	33 (79)	42 (168)	66 (97)	66 (83)	52 (156)	45 (199)	56 (601)	63 (300)	75 (257)	56.3 (2002)
	Black	40 (30)	19 (27)	29 (28)	40 (10)	[6] (7)	47 (15)	41 (29)	53 (47)	54 (26)	[7] (9)	43.9 (228)
1980	White	56 (36)	57 (42)	64 (102)	71 (66)	90 (68)	54 (91)	55 (111)	72 (342)	79 (199)	93 (162)	72.3 (1219)
	Black	56 (16)	64 (14)	63 (19)	[6] (8)	[3] (3)	88 (17)	48 (29)	70 (30)	65 (23)	[6] (6)	66.7 (165)

Source: Surveys conducted by the Survey Research Center and the Center for Political Studies of the University of Michigan.

Note: Numbers in parentheses are totals upon which percentages are based. Numbers in brackets are the number who said they voted in cases when the total *N* is less than 10. Weighted Ns for 1976.

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TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE WHO VOTED ACCORDING TO VOTER VALIDATION STUDIES, BY RACE, REGION, AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION: 1964, 1976, 1978, 1980

Year of Election	Race	South					Outside the South					Total
		8 Grades or Less	Some High School	High School Graduate	Some College	College Graduate	8 Grades or Less	Some High School	High School Graduate	Some College	College Graduate	
1964	White	44 (39)	52 (31)	59 (41)	68 (19)	63 (19)	69 (192)	72 (161)	78 (314)	82 (119)	87 (114)	73.5 (1049)
	Black	29 (24)	47 (17)	[1] (8)	[1] (1)	[1] (1)	72 (18)	58 (12)	57 (14)	90 (10)	[6] (7)	54.5 (112)
1976	White	44 (67)	42 (72)	46 (123)	56 (86)	74 (53)	57 (216)	51 (210)	64 (630)	75 (300)	75 (286)	62.7 (2043)
	Black	38 (53)	41 (22)	41 (31)	60 (13)	[3] (3)	62 (16)	32 (21)	46 (19)	56 (31)	[6] (8)	46.6 (217)
1978	White	33 (55)	20 (76)	31 (158)	44 (90)	58 (78)	45 (152)	38 (198)	46 (591)	49 (299)	64 (255)	45.8 (1952)
	Black	14 (29)	4 (24)	12 (26)	10 (10)	[2] (5)	33 (15)	21 (29)	30 (46)	36 (25)	[6] (9)	23.4 (218)
1980	White	47 (34)	41 (37)	52 (95)	66 (58)	79 (63)	48 (89)	50 (106)	63 (322)	68 (177)	86 (146)	63.2 (1127)
	Black	40 (15)	50 (14)	56 (18)	[6] (8)	[2] (3)	77 (13)	42 (26)	52 (27)	53 (19)	[3] (5)	53.4 (148)

Source: Surveys conducted by the Survey Research Center and the Center for Political Studies of the University of Michigan.

Note: Numbers in parentheses are totals upon which percentages are based. Numbers in brackets are the number who were classified as voting when the total *N* is less than 10. Weighted *N*s for 1976.

a comparison reveals that in 1964 southern whites were consistently less likely to vote than northern whites, and that southern blacks were much less likely to vote than northern blacks.   However, the relationship of region to turnout declines markedly after 1964, and it is weak and incon-sistent in 1980.

To estimate whether low levels of black turnout resulted from regional and educational differences we first employed an algebraic standardiza-tion procedure.   We asked what black turnout would have been if blacks had the same educational levels as whites and if they were as likely as whites to live outside the South.   For each year we multiplied the number of whites in each subset by the percentage of black turnout for that subset, summed these products, and divided by the total number of whites. Table 3 shows our standardization procedures applied to reported turnout, and table 4 shows the results when the voter validation variable is used.   Each table presents the results of four equations.   Reading across each election year block, we first simply report white and black turnout, and we show the percentage point difference (epsilon) obtained by subtracting black turnout from white turnout.   The second equation shows black turnout with region standardized, as well as the difference obtained by subtract-ing standardized black turnout from white turnout.   By comparing the new difference with the original difference, we can estimate the propor-tion of the racial difference accounted for by controlling for region. Equa-tion (3) presents similar results with level of education standardized, and the final equation shows our calculations when we standardize simultaneously for region and level of education.

Turning first to *reported* turnout (see table 3), we see that region ex-erted a substantial impact in 1964, and controls for region eliminated over four-fifths of the racial differences in reported turnout.   The impact of region dropped after that, accounting for only three-fifths of the racial differences in reported turnout in 1976, three-tenths in 1978, and only a trace in 1980.   Controls for level of education removed over half of the racial differences in turnout in 1964, over three-fifths in 1976, over two-fifths in 1978, and they removed all of the racial differences in 1980.

Although region and level of education were modestly related to each other, combined controls for region and level of education consistently removed more of the racial differences in reported turnout than controls for either of these variables alone.   In fact, combined controls for region and level of education eliminated and even marginally reversed racial dif-ferences in reported turnout in all three presidential elections, and re-moved three-fifths of the difference in 1978.

Substantially different results obtain when the *voter validation studies* are used to measure turnout (see table 4).   Since the zero-order dif-ferences between whites and blacks are substantially greater, controls for

TABLE 3

ACTUAL AND STANDARDIZED RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN REPORTED TURNOUT: 1964, 1976, 1978, 1980

YEAR OF ELECTION	EQUATION NUMBER	STANDARDIZATION INTRODUCED FOR FOLLOWING VARIABLE(S)	WHITE TURNOUT (%)	BLACK TURNOUT (%)	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHITE TURNOUT AND BLACK TURNOUT[a]	PERCENTAGE OF RACIAL DIFFERENCES ACCOUNTED FOR BY STANDARDIZATION PROCEDURES
1964	(1)	None	79.9	65.3	14.6	--
	(2)	Region	--	77.6	2.3	84
	(3)	Level of Education	--	73.3	6.6	55
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	--	80.4	-.5	103
1976	(1)	None	72.8	64.6	8.2	--
	(2)	Region	--	69.7	3.1	62
	(3)	Level of Education	--	69.8	3.0	63
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	--	73.9	-1.1	113
1978	(1)	None	56.3	43.9	12.4	--
	(2)	Region	--	47.4	8.9	28
	(3)	Level of Education	--	49.3	7.0	44
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	--	51.7	4.6	63
1980	(1)	None	72.3	66.7	5.6	--
	(2)	Region	--	66.9	5.4	4
	(3)	Level of Education	--	72.3	.0	100
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	--	73.2	-.9	116

Source: Surveys conducted by the Survey Research Center and the Center for Political Studies of the University of Michigan.
Note: For the numbers upon which these estimates are based, see table 1.
[a] White turnout minus black turnout.

TABLE 4

ACTUAL AND STANDARDIZED RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN TURNOUT AS MEASURED BY THE VOTER VALIDATION STUDIES:
1964, 1976, 1978, 1980

YEAR OF ELECTION	EQUATION NUMBER	STANDARDIZATION INTRODUCED FOR FOLLOWING VARIABLE(s)	WHITE TURNOUT (%)	BLACK TURNOUT (%)	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHITE TURNOUT AND BLACK TURNOUT[a]	PERCENTAGE OF RACIAL DIFFERENCES ACCOUNTED FOR BY STANDARDIZATION PROCEDURES
1964	(1)	None	73.5	54.5	19.0	--
	(2)	Region	--	65.5	8.0	58
	(3)	Level of Education	--	57.1	16.4	14
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	--	65.3	8.2	57
1976	(1)	None	62.7	46.6	16.1	--
	(2)	Region	--	50.0	12.7	21
	(3)	Level of Education	--	51.7	11.0	32
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	--	53.0	9.7	40
1978	(1)	None	45.8	23.4	22.4	--
	(2)	Region	--	27.5	18.3	18
	(3)	Level of Education	--	28.7	17.1	24
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	--	31.6	14.2	37
1980	(1)	None	63.2	53.4	9.8	--
	(2)	Region	--	53.3	9.9	-1
	(3)	Level of Education	--	55.3	7.9	19
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	--	56.1	7.1	28

Source: Surveys conducted by the Survey Research Center and the Center for Political Studies of the University of Michigan.
Note: For the numbers upon which these estimates are based, see table 2.
[a] White turnout minus black turnout.

region and level of education have far less impact on reducing them. Controls for region now remove less than three-fifths of the racial differences in 1964, only one-fifth in 1976, one-sixth in 1978, and they have no effect in 1980.   Controls for level of education now remove only one-seventh of the racial differences in 1964, one-third in 1976, only one-fourth in 1978, and only one-fifth in 1980.   In all years except 1964, combined controls for region and level of education remove more of the racial differences than do single controls.   Even so, combined controls remove less than three-fifths of the zero-order differences in 1964, only two-fifths in 1976, just over one-third in 1978, and just over one-fourth the difference in 1980.

Up to this point, our analysis has estimated the impact of controls on racial differences by imagining what black turnout would be if blacks had the same social characteristics as whites.   Our algebraic standardization procedures can be supplemented with several analytical techniques. Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, we estimated a series of categorical regression equations using a procedure outlined by Grizzle, Starmer, and Koch (1969; for an additional discussion, see Kritzer, 1978).   This procedure provides methodologically appropriate and easily interpretable estimates of the impact of one or more independent variables on a categorical dependent variable.

Four different categorical regression equations were estimated for both reported and validated turnout in each year.   The results of our analysis of reported turnout are presented in table 5, and the results of our analysis of turnout as measured by the voter validation variable are presented in table 6.   (The scoring procedures used for our estimates are spelled out in these tables.)   Reading across each election-year block, the first row reports the zero-order relationship between race and turnout, i.e., the estimated difference between white and black turnout produced by regressing turnout against race.   To the extent that racial differences result from regional and educational differences, subsequent controls should reduce this zero-order relationship.

For our second equation we regressed turnout against race and region. The key result from this equation — the difference between white turnout and black turnout when the effects of region are controlled — is reported on the second row.   By comparing this difference with the zero-order relationship, we can estimate how much of the original racial difference can be accounted for by controlling for region.   For our third equation we regressed turnout against both race and education, and on the third row we show the difference between white and black turnout after controls for level of education are introduced.   For our final equation we regressed turnout against race, region, and level of education, and on the

last row we present the racial difference in turnout once both region and education are controlled.

We turn first to the relationship between race and *reported* turnout. As table 5 shows, in 1964 controls for region removed three-fifths of the relationship between race and reported turnout. Controls for region removed over two-fifths of the difference in 1976, but only one-seventh in 1978, and less than one-tenth of the difference in 1980.

On the other hand, the impact of education on turnout appears to have grown. Controls for level of education remove under half of the racial differences in reported turnout in 1964. In 1976, controls for level of education remove over half the difference. The impact of education drops somewhat in the 1978 midterm election, but in 1980 controls for education eliminate racial differences in reported electoral participation.

The relationship of race to reported turnout is always lowest when combined controls for region and level of education are introduced. When we control for blacks being more likely to live in the South and for their lower levels of formal education, we find that in 1964 and 1976 nine-tenths of the zero-order difference is removed. In 1978 nearly half the racial difference in reported turnout is removed, and in 1980 racial differences are eliminated and even reversed.

The pattern of changing levels of statistical significance provides additional evidence. In all the elections except 1980, the zero-order relationship between race and reported turnout is significant. But in all four elections there is no significant relationship between race and reported turnout when both regional and educational differences are taken into account. If we were to rely upon the results of our analyses of reported turnout, we would agree with the standard wisdom about the effects of race upon participation: race appears to have no independent impact upon depressing electoral participation.

When we examine turnout as measured by the *voter validation variable* (see table 6), some strikingly different results emerge. There are, of course, some similarities with the results in table 5. Regardless of which measure of turnout is used, region has little effect in the two most recent elections. For both measures, education exerts its greatest impact in 1980. But once the validated turnout measure is used, the impact of introducing these controls on racial differences is diminished. Even when combined controls for region and level of education are introduced, the relationship between race and turnout is reduced by only half in 1964 and 1976, by only one-fifth in 1978, and by three-fourths in 1980 — always less than when the reported turnout measure is employed.

In all four elections there is a significant zero-order relationship between race and turnout as measured by the voter validation variable. In

TABLE 5

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WHITE AND BLACK REPORTED TURNOUT AS ESTIMATED BY CATEGORICAL REGRESSION EQUATIONS (ZERO-ORDER DIFFERENCES AND DIFFERENCES WITH CONTROLS): 1964, 1976, 1978, 1980

YEAR OF ELECTION	EQUATION NUMBER	CONTROLS INTRODUCED FOR FOLLOWING VARIABLE(s)	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHITE TURNOUT AND BLACK TURNOUT[a]	PERCENTAGE OF RACIAL DIFFERENCES ACCOUNTED FOR BY CONTROLS
1964	(1)	None	.155**	--
	(2)	Region	.064	59
	(3)	Level of Education	.082*	47
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	.013	92
1976	(1)	None	.089**	--
	(2)	Region	.051	43
	(3)	Level of Education	.039	56
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	.008	91
1978	(1)	None	.123**	--
	(2)	Region	.104**	15
	(3)	Level of Education	.077*	37
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	.064	48
1980	(1)	None	.060	--
	(2)	Region	.056	7
	(3)	Level of Education	-.001	102
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	-.027	145

Source: Surveys conducted by the Survey Research Center and the Center for Political Studies of the University of Michigan.

Note: Variables scored as follows: Race, −1 = black, 1 = white; Region, −1 = outside the South, 1 = South; Level of Education was treated as a series of four dummy variables with each of the four lower levels of education compared with college graduates.   For the numbers upon which these estimates are based, see table 1.   For the handful of instances where we had empty cells (resulting from all respondents claiming to have voted), .5 cases were added.

[a] White turnout minus black turnout.   This difference is derived by doubling the size of the estimated regression coefficient since with our dummy variable procedures this coefficient is equal to half the distance between white and black turnout.

* Significant at .05.   (Based upon X^2s.)   **Significant at .01.   (Based upon X^2s.)

TABLE 6

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WHITE AND BLACK TURNOUT AS MEASURED BY THE VOTER VALIDATION STUDIES AS ESTIMATED BY CATEGORICAL REGRESSION EQUATIONS (ZERO-ORDER DIFFERENCES AND DIFFERENCES WITH CONTROLS): 1964, 1976, 1978, 1980

YEAR OF ELECTION	EQUATION NUMBER	CONTROLS INTRODUCED FOR FOLLOWING VARIABLE(s)	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHITE TURNOUT AND BLACK TURNOUT[a]	PERCENTAGE OF RACIAL DIFFERENCES ACCOUNTED FOR BY CONTROLS
1964	(1)	None	.195**	--
	(2)	Region	.114*	42
	(3)	Level of Education	.139**	29
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	.091*	53
1976	(1)	None	.157**	--
	(2)	Region	.106**	32
	(3)	Level of Education	.119**	24
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	.077*	51
1978	(1)	None	.224**	--
	(2)	Region	.210**	6
	(3)	Level of Education	.192**	14
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	.177**	21
1980	(1)	None	.098*	--
	(2)	Region	.091*	7
	(3)	Level of Education	.041	58
	(4)	Region and Level of Education	.022	78

Source: Surveys conducted by the Survey Research Center and the Center for Political Studies of the University of Michigan.

Note: Variables scored as follows: Race, –1 = black, 1 = white; Region, –1 = outside the South, 1 = South; Level of Education was treated as a series of four dummy variables with each of the four lower levels of education compared with college graduates. For the numbers upon which these estimates are based, see table 2. For the handful of instances where we had empty cells (resulting from all respondents being classified as voters), .5 cases were added.

[a] White turnout minus black turnout. This difference is derived by doubling the size of the estimated regression coefficient since with our dummy variable procedures this coefficient is equal to half the distance between white and black turnout.

* Significant at .05. (Based upon X^2s.)

** Significant at .01. (Based upon X^2s.)

all elections except 1980 race is significantly related to turnout even when controls for both region and education are introduced. Even in 1980 blacks are somewhat less likely to participate than whites, while they are slightly more likely to participate when reported turnout is used as the criterion variable.

CONCLUSION

When the validated turnout measure is used, the conventional wisdom about the relationship between race and turnout is not supported. Using two independent techniques, we found that race continues to be related to turnout, even after socioeconomic and regional controls are introduced. Our findings clearly call into question the thesis that race has no independent impact on depressing electoral participation.

Despite the clarity of our results, we recognize that our findings raise more questions than they answer. Analyses of the voter validation studies reveal no major biases in voting overreports, except for the tendency of blacks to be more likely to overreport voting. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that this exception results from a systematic tendency of the voter validation process to underestimate black turnout. Assuming that blacks do in fact more often overreport voting than whites, we have not tested explanations that might account for their overreporting. Sigelman (1982) has discovered that "nonvoting voters" are more similar to validated voters than they are to respondents who acknowledge that they do not vote, but we do not know if this conclusion obtains among blacks. Future students of black electoral participation will need carefully to compare acknowledged black nonvoters, blacks whose claim to have voted is not supported by the voter validation check, with blacks who are validated voters. We must, however, caution that the small number of blacks sampled makes such comparisons difficult.

Above all, we do not know whether the tendency of blacks to over-report voting carries over into reports about other forms of political participation. Since there is no external standard against which to compare most forms of political participation, we simply do not know, nor can we know, whether blacks are more likely to overreport participation in these areas. If they are, this would call into question a large number of empirical findings as well as theories of group consciousness that attempt to account for black overparticipation. We must emphasize, however, that we have only presented findings about turnout, and we question only those arguments that claim that feelings of group consciousness boost black turnout to relatively higher levels than turnout among whites. Feelings of group consciousness may contribute to black turnout, but our findings suggest that whatever their consequences the aggregate impact of

these feelings has not raised black turnout above white turnout, or even eliminated low levels of black electoral participation.

We also emphasize that the relationship of race to turnout may be changing.   Given the impact of Reagan's policies upon blacks, black turnout has been rising (see Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, 1983, pp. 288–89), and efforts to mobilize blacks in 1984 may be appreciably more successful than previous get-out-the-vote efforts.   Jesse Jackson's presidential candidacy has already increased black registration and primary participation, and it may lead to higher turnout in the general election as well.   If absolute differences in turnout between blacks and whites are reduced substantially, it is likely that socioeconomic controls will serve to eliminate or reverse racial differences.   Indeed, our analysis provides a clue that this may happen.   The year in which racial differences in turnout were lowest was 1980.   Both our standardization procedures and categorical regression analyses show that this was also the only year in which controls for level of education eliminated racial differences in reported turnout.   According to our categorical regression analysis, 1980 was the only year in which controls reduced the relationship between race and validated turnout below statistical significance.[8]

The voter validation studies suggest that blacks are still somewhat less likely to vote than similarly situated whites.   We hope, however, that our results across this series of past surveys of the American electorate are not confirmed in subsequent surveys, and that the gap in electoral participation between blacks and whites is eliminated.

[8] The 1982 SRC-CPS survey did not include a voter validation study.   It found that blacks were 2 percentage points *more* likely to say they voted than whites.   Our algebraic standardization procedures suggest that if controls for level of education and region are introduced, blacks are 6 percentage points more likely to vote than whites.   With our categorical regression equations the zero-order racial difference in turnout is $-.013$.   With simultaneous controls for race and region, this difference becomes $-.081$, which is statistically significant at the .05 level.

However, the 1982 turnout survey by the U.S. Bureau of the Census found that blacks were 7 points less likely to say they voted than were whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983, p. vi).   While blacks were still less likely to vote than whites, racial differences were lower than those in any of the previous nine elections studied by the Bureau.

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APPENDIX

Classifying respondents as reported voters or nonvoters is straightfor-
ward, but there are year-to-year variations in the coding procedures for
the voter validation studies.   We used the following coding decisions to
classify respondents as validated voters or nonvoters.

For the 1964 SRC survey, Variable 456 provides a single summary
measure.   We classified respondents coded 1 or 7 as voters, those coded 3
or 5 as nonvoters, and all other values were classified as not ascertained.
Respondents in the black supplement were not included in the SRC voter
validation study, and we also excluded these respondents from our
analysis of reported turnout.

To develop a measure of validated voting for 1976 one must use the
1972–1974–1976 panel file.   There is no single summary variable that can
be employed to determine whether or not respondents voted.   We
classified respondents as voters if they were coded 1 on Variable 5012, and
as nonvoters if they were coded 5 on Variable 5003, on Variable 5011, or
on Variable 5012.

For 1978, Variable 1410 serves as an unambiguous summary variable,
with respondents coded 1 as voters and those coded 5 as nonvoters.

For 1980, Variable 1207 serves as a basic summary measure.
Respondents coded 1 were classified as voters, while respondents coded 2,
3, or 4 were classified as nonvoters.   Respondents coded 5 were registered
to vote, but they lived in two Alabama counties and one Louisiana parish
where officials would not allow the SRC field staff to verify whether peo-
ple voted.   We classified these respondents as voters if they said they
voted, as nonvoters if they said they did not vote.   All other values were
classified as not ascertained.

In 1964 and 1976 the SRC conducted a voter validation study only for
respondents for whom there was a postelection interview.   (In 1978, as in
most midterm surveys, there was only a postelection survey.)   In 1980,

the voter validation study also included respondents for whom there was no postelection interview.   However, the SRC warns that respondents were asked for their registration address only in the postelection inter- view. Information about respondents who are only in the preelection survey is therefore less reliable than information about respondents in both the preelection and postelection surveys.   In addition, there is no measure of reported turnout for respondents who are only in the preelec- tion survey. We present results only for respondents in the postelection survey.